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# More Than Just A Game: From Regional Sports Rivalry to Separatist Politics

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**More Than Just A Game:  
From Regional Sports Rivalry to Separatist Politics**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors  
May 2015

Honors Capstone Project in: Public Relations, International Relations,  
and Political Science

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Date: [April 20, 2015]

### **Abstract**

In the Capstone, I will explore one of the most intense football clashes in history: El Clásico (The Classic), which refers to a match-up between Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona. When these most successful football clubs meet on the field for 90 minutes of intense action, it soon becomes very clear that this is much more than just a game or just sports. The field can be seen as a battleground, and the game could be a substitute for war between two ideologies, cultures, and social classes. This rivalry has a real and profound political tone, which goes back many decades. Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona not only represent Madrid and Barcelona, but they are also associated with opposing political positions. Real Madrid C.F. represents Spanish nationalism, right-wing establishment-based ideology, and the central government. FC Barcelona represents Catalanism and left-wing and socialism.

When the teams compete on the field, the two political ideologies also clash. Moreover, FC Barcelona supports the separatism movement of Catalan, and this is clearly evident from fan behavior. The slogan “*més que un club*” (more than a club) expresses FC Barcelona’s commitment to Catalan society, which has gone beyond the realm of sports. The club always supports the Catalan region and honors its culture. The political atmosphere surrounding this unique football rivalry completely overwhelmed and fascinated me. One cannot fully understand this rivalry without taking historical, cultural, and political backgrounds into account.

I want to understand where these clubs fit in today’s Spanish society. Are these clubs more than sporting institutions? Will the love and hatred surrounding El Clásico continue for another century? What do ordinary fans really think about the rivalry and how do they express their feelings via the social medium of Twitter? What factors have kept the rivalry going? Who has engineered and hyped the rivalry and why?

## **Executive Summary**

As a student of public relations, international relations, and political science, I have tremendous interest in foreign policy, national security, and diplomacy and want to work for the United Nations as an international social servant. For my Capstone, I combine my academic knowledge, skills I have learned from my majors, and my passionate love for communications and sports to investigate the problems of regional conflicts. I use sports rivalry as a window to understand regional conflicts, how politics impact sports, and how interest groups manipulate sports to their advantages and how the manipulation impacts separatist issues in Spain.

I researched how the central and Catalan governments have used media and engineered the rivalry to manipulate emotion and perception of people from both regions. I also wanted to know what ordinary people really think about the rivalry. What do people from the two regions think matters the most? Do they consider El Clásico as a healthy competition or harmful hatred? In order to hear the voice of ordinary people, I analyze tweets and conduct sentiment analysis. The results may have significant implications for the government's decisions for dealing with regional issues.

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## **A. Introduction and theory:**

### **1. Historical conflicts:**

El Clásico (The Classic), the most intense football competition in the world, refers to the annual match-up between Real Madrid Club de Fútbol (Real Madrid C.F.) and Futbol Club Barcelona (FC Barcelona). When these two most successful football clubs meet on the field for 90 minutes of intense action, the media in Spain keep asking, “Only football?” It soon becomes crystal clear that El Clásico has always been much more than just a game or just sports. The symbols off the pitch and what they mean on it make the games incomparable, charismatic, and problematic. Especially during El Clásico, the field can be seen as a battleground, and the game could be a substitute for war between two ideologies, cultures, and social classes. This rivalry, which dates from 1902, has a real and profound political tone. The history of the Catalan region not only reinforces this rivalry but also explains the origin of the hostility between the two clubs.

After defeating Philip IV of Spain and winning Guerra dels Segadors (Catalan Revolt or Reapers’ War) in 1640, the Catalan region declared independence under French protection for 12 years (Storrs, 2003). When Philip V of Spain claimed victory in the Siege of Barcelona and won the Spanish crown on September 11, 1714, Barcelona fell under control of the new King (Paoletti, 2001). Until that time, the Catalan region had been a self-governing principality beginning with the 9th century under the leadership of the Count of Barcelona (Greene, 2011). Many Catalonians consider the loss of the War of Spanish Succession a loss of “independence” because following the war the region became a part of the Crown of Castile’s territory (Epps & Fernández, 2005). Philip V issued the Nueva Planta decrees, abolishing all the major Catalan political institutions,

traditional customs of Catalan culture, and the Catalan language (Paoletti, 2001). The domination by the central government still antagonizes the symbolic mindset of the Catalan people, who consider Madrid as the natural enemy (Phillips & Phillips, 2010). The Catalan region enjoyed a short period of freedom from 1914 to 1925, when a Catalan parliament, Mancomunitat de Catalunya (Commonwealth of Catalonia), governed the region (Greene, 2011).

General Miguel Primo de Rivera initiated the coup d'état and dictated the country from September 1923 to January 1930 (Casanova & Andrés, 2014). He created an authoritarian and nationalistic regime around the motto "Country, Religion, Monarchy" (Phillips & Phillips, 2010). General Miguel Primo de Rivera graduated from Toledo General Military Academy, which was located in the autonomous community of Madrid (Casanova & Andrés, 2014). He served in the Spanish army, fought in Morocco, Cuba, and the Philippines, and became major general in 1910 (Smith, 2007). Primo de Rivera witnessed the loss of the Philippines to the United States in 1898, which signaled the decline of the Spain Empire (Shubert, 2009). The loss of territory also triggered "La Setmana Tràgica" (Tragic Week), a series of violent conflicts between the Spanish army and working classes in Barcelona and other cities of the Catalonia region during the last week of July 1909 (Cal, 2000). As the captain general of Barcelona, Primo de Rivera saw the unrest and upheaval and questioned the effectiveness of a parliamentary system (Smith, 2007). Therefore, after coming to power in 1923, he abolished the Cortes (parliaments) including the Catalonia parliament, suspended constitutional guarantees, and suppressed liberties in Catalonia (Phillips & Phillips, 2010).

The Segunda República Española (Second Spanish Republic) ruled Spain from 1931 to 1939 after dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera failed to earn support from the middle classes and was forced by the military to resign (Greene, 2011). The democratic regime introduced the Constitución De La República Española (The Spanish Constitution of 1931), which guaranteed all of Spain's regions the right to autonomy including Catalonia and the Basque Country (Eastman, 2012). The Catalonia region enjoyed significant autonomous powers and civil liberties during its governance (Phillips & Phillips, 2010). However, after winning the Spanish Civil War in 1939, General Francisco Franco promoted his version of Spanish nationalism, a unitary national identity, by repressing Spain's cultural diversity (Kennedy-Epstein, 2013). Franco revoked most of the political rights the Catalonia region had once had and issued harsh policies that banned Catalan culture and language (Payne, 1990). General Franco censored all regional traditions and prohibited many of them such as Sardana, the national dance of Catalonia (Casanova & Andrés, 2014). He also used language politics in attempting to establish national homogeneity (Phillips & Phillips, 2010). He encouraged the use of Castilian Spanish and suppressed other languages such as Catalan and Basque (Payne, 1990). He considered Castilian Spanish the only legal language and decreed that it be used for all governmental, legal, and commercial documents (Payne, 1990). General Franco forbid using other languages in schools, in public signs, and in advertisements. For unofficial use, citizens continued to speak non-Castilian Spanish languages (Laberge, 2014). In the late 1960s, these unofficial languages could be spoken and written freely (Greene, 2011). They could be seen in bookshops or stages, although



the dictator never gave them official status (Casanova & Andrés, 2014). After dictator Franco's death in 1975, the region finally regained self-governing powers.

## 2. Current situation:

However, some Catalans wanted more than just autonomy; they demanded an independent Catalan State because they dreamed of enjoying freedom again. They rallied to demand independence on September 11, 2012, during Diada (the National Day of Catalonia), a daylong commemoration of the defeat of Catalonia in the War of the Spanish Succession (Vives, 2013). Approximately 1.5 million protesters marched in central Barcelona, according to the city's Municipal Police force (Piñol, 2012). The protesters waved esteladas (Catalan independence flags) and chanted "Catalunya, nou estat d'Europa" (Catalonia, new state in Europe) (Cortés, 2012). The Generalitat de Catalunya (Government of Catalonia) defied the central government by holding a referendum of self-determination on November 9, 2014 (Moffett, 2014). The regional government urged all Catalans to vote on the political future of the region even though the Constitutional Court of Spain had ruled the referendum unlawful (Comella, 2014). The ballot consisted of only two questions: "Do you want Catalonia to become a State?" and "Do you want this State to be independent?" Only those who answered "yes" to the first question could reply to the second question (Government of Catalonia, 2014).

According to provisional figures, 80.76% (1,861,7536 people) of participants voted "yes" to both questions. 10.07 % voted "yes" and "no" and 4.54% voted "no" to both questions (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2014). However, "even the organizers wouldn't claim that the 80% figure should lead to independence" because many political opinions polls conducted by different media and universities discovered that Catalans held

extremely disparate views regarding the independence question (Nardelli, 2014). Nearly three years ago, in 2012, about 25% of Catalonia's population of 7.5 million participated in the demonstration to support an independent Catalan State (The Economist, 2012). Now, a third of the Catalans have cast a ballot asking their voices to be heard on independence (The Economist, 2012). Regardless of the legitimacy and results of the referendum, Catalan separatists demonstrated their determination to the Spanish central government and the world (Guibernau, 2014). They utilized not only political demonstration but also sporting events to express their political beliefs (Vives, 2013).

### 3. Political implications of El Clásico

Without the historical background, one cannot fully understand the sports rivalry between Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona and its impacts on regional politics, cultures, and the stability of Spain. The relationship between the two clubs reflects the social and political reality of the nation.

Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona not only represent two cities, but they also support two opposing political positions. Real Madrid C.F. represents Spanish nationalism, a right-wing establishment-based ideology, and the central government. As Joan Laporta, a former Barcelona president said, "El Clásico is a sporting confrontation with political connotations. Madrid has always represented Spain, and we have always represented Catalonia" (Agencia EFE, 2012). The City of Madrid stands in the central plateau of Castile and sits on the geographical center of Spain (Greene, 2011). Philip II of Spain made Madrid the capital in 1561 and marked its Kilometre Zero (kilometer zero) in the center of the Puerta del Sol (Gate of the Sun) at the clock of the old Royal House of

the Post Office (Casanova & Andrés, 2014). Kilometre Zero has served the theoretical starting point of every road in Spain (Phillips & Phillips, 2010).

FC Barcelona represents Catalan nationalism and left-wing socialism (Ranachan, 2008). When the teams compete in the field, the two political ideologies clash as well. The city of Barcelona sits on the Mediterranean Sea facing France and Italy and embraces fashion and political philosophies from these countries (Vaczi, 2015). Moreover, FC Barcelona supports the separatist movement of Catalan, and fans' behaviors clearly demonstrate their political preference. The slogan "més que un club" (more than a club) expresses FC Barcelona's ambition and commitment to Catalan society, which has gone beyond the realm of sports (Ranachan, 2008). The club always supports the Catalan region and honors its culture. Many culés (Barcelona fans) have fantasized the possibility of witnessing the epic moment that Toni Strubell i Trueta, a member of the Catalan parliament and a Catalan linguist, described as a prophecy: the day when FC Barcelona's Camp Nou (New Field or Nou Camp) stadium chanted for independence would be the day Catalan regained its independence (Lowe, 2014). Strubell's grandfather Josep Trueta i Raspall, a respectable medical doctor and famous Catalan nationalist who was forced into exile to England for political asylum after the Spanish Civil War, had always described the image of this day to Strubell, when he was a little boy (Vives, 2013). Undoubtedly, numerous Barcelona fans, like the Strubell, have prayed for this day for generations. Therefore, FC Barcelona and Catalan separatism are interconnected.

#### 4. Development of the rivalry:

Although many people believe that politics and sports should not mix in Spain, the two clubs cannot be isolated from society. Bobby Robson, a former Barcelona coach,

argues that El Clásico remains the biggest game in the world (Fitzpatrick, 2013). No match in the history of football has more political connotation than El Clásico (Vives, 2013). The sporting rivalry between Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona, which some describe as the greatest on earth, began at the Madrid Hippodrome on May 13, 1902 (FIFA, 2015). Since then, the two teams have competed in 230 matches. Real Madrid C.F. won 92 competitive games to FC Barcelona's 89 (Fitzpatrick, 2013).

Due to the unique identities of both clubs and the cities that they represent, El Clásico not only attracts special attention but also conveys profound meanings. Former Barcelona player Hristo Stoichkov Stoichkov defines the El Clásico as “rebellion against the Establishment” (Kuzner, 2010). Many clues describe the game as the state against the nation, freedom fighters against Franco's fascists (Bell, 2011), and a continuation of the Spanish Civil War by defending the honor of Catalonia and mourning the tragic death of Josep Sunyol, the “martyr president” of FC Barcelona who was assassinated by General Franco's troops in the summer of 1936 (FCBarcelona, 2015). Bobby Robson claims provocatively that “Catalonia is a country, and FC Barcelona is its army” (Mitten, 2012).

Can El Clásico be understood as purely a sports rivalry in terms of football without considering the social and political factors? Joan Gaspart, former president of FC Barcelona, answered firmly: “Impossible” (Caioli, 2014). Gaspart explains that history has transformed both clubs into more than just two sports teams. FC Barcelona is committed to defend “a country, a language, and a culture” (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Gaspart's successor, Joan Laporta, confirmed that FC Barcelona is the unofficial Catalan national team. Laporta answered the question with a big smile: “‘Més que un club’ is not just a

slogan. It is a declaration of principles” (Malone, 2012). FC Barcelona and Catalans have upheld their version of history. So do Madrid C.F. and Madridistas (fans of Madrid C.F.).

Clúes accuse Madrid C.F. of being General Franco’s team because the “central government has always shown favor to Madrid C.F.,” recalled former Barcelona coach Aloysius Paulus Maria van Gaal (Kassam, 2014). The former Catalan minister of culture Jordi Vilajoana i Rovira argued, “The Franco regime used sport to assert its power” (Tuñón & Brey, 2012). Therefore, many believe showing that Catalonia can compete with Madrid lies at the center of the narrative of El Clásico. Àngel Alonso Herrera, a former Barcelona player, argues that FC Barcelona created its slogan to resist the Franco’s dictatorship (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Lluís Flaquer Vilardebò, a Catalan sociologist, discovered a psychological phenomenon that Barcelona fans transported their anger toward General Franco by shouting at Real Madrid’s players (Kuper, 2009).

##### 5. Alfredo Di Stéfano affair:

In 1999, when FC Barcelona celebrated its centenari or 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, the club conducted a survey, which indicated 85% of clúes believe that the central government systematically handicapped them (FCBarcelona, 1999). More than ever, clúes complained that FC Barcelona lost out on the signing of Alfredo Di Stéfano, a legend of Real Madrid C.F. and a one of the greatest players of all time, allegedly due to General Franco’s intervention (Taylor, 2014).

Di Stéfano was considered as the turning point in the history of the game. It all began on September 23, 1953, when Di Stéfano put on his first white Real Madrid jersey (Relaño, 2014). As a football player, the brightest star of Real Madrid C.F.’s history helped the team to win the European Cup in the competition’s first five seasons, as well

as one Intercontinental Cup, one FIFA Club World Cup, 8 La Liga titles, and one Campeonato de España – Copa de Su Majestad el Rey (Championship of Spain – His Majesty the King's Cup or King's Cup), which amazed the international football world (Lacey, 2011). As a coach and the honorary president of Real Madrid C.F., he won one Supercopa de España (Spanish Super Cup) and turned the team into the most successful football club in the world (Manawatu Standard, 2014).

Di Stéfano's transfer includes complicated claims, denials, counter-denials, and conspiracies interconnecting and involving four football clubs in three countries (West, 2014). Allegations of treachery, a mysterious contract, and the possible personal intervention of a dictator might have become the eye of this Di Stéfano hurricane (The Times, 2014). In the spring of 1952, Di Stefano, the 25-year-old world-renowned Argentine forward who played for Millonarios Fútbol Club S.A., a professional Colombian football club, came to Spain for a friendly tournament in Madrid (Relaño, 2014). His breathtaking performances made both Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona want to recruit him immediately (Taylor, 2014).

On one hand, FC Barcelona negotiated with the Argentine giant Club Atlético River Plate that claimed to own Di Stéfano's registration rights (France-Presse, 2014). However, Millonarios Fútbol Club S.A. also claimed to have Di Stéfano's registration rights (Manawatu Standard, 2014). On the other hand, Real Madrid C.F. negotiated and reached a deal with the Colombian club (France-Presse, 2014). Nevertheless, nationalist Catalan lawyer and negotiator Ramon Trias i Fargas tried to work with both South American clubs (Relaño, 2014). However, FC Barcelona might have made a fatal mistake by underestimating Millonarios Fútbol Club S.A. when seeking the help of fellow

Catalan Joan Busquets, who lived in Colombia (West, 2014). Busquets just happened to be a director of Millonarios' biggest local rivals, Independiente Santa Fe S.A. (West, 2014). His presence along with other factors caused the Colombian club to reject FC Barcelona's deal (Taylor, 2014). At this point, both Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona refused to budge from their positions since both of them believed they had an agreement with the real owner of Di Stéfano's registration rights (France-Presse, 2014). FC Barcelona decided to ignore the rejection from Millonarios Fútbol Club S.A., and focused on an arrangement for Di Stéfano and his family to leave Colombia, fly to Barcelona, and settle into life with his "new" club in summer 1953 (West, 2014).

When the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) intervened and reached its verdict in September 1953, it came to a surprising compromise: Di Stéfano could play for alternate clubs over the course of four years, starting with a season at Real Madrid C.F. (West, 2014). Then FC Barcelona president Enric Martí Carreto was forced to resign due to his incompetency of holding this issue (Manawatu Standard, 2014). After Real Madrid C.F. paid back to the 4.5 million pesetas that FC Barcelona had already transferred to Club Atlético River Plate, the interim board tore up the contract and freed Di Stéfano to join the rival team for good (Relaño, 2014). Hence, since the mid-1940s and especially throughout the 1950s, many teams have regarded Real Madrid C.F. as Franco's team, although the extent of the dictator's interference in sporting matters has probably been exaggerated (Tuñón & Brey, 2012). Eventually, Di Stéfano did move to Madrid. A month later, the first El Clásico of the season took place at Estadio Santiago Bernabéu in 1953. Madrid C.F. won by 5-0, and Di Stéfano scored four of the points. He has remained the second highest goalscorer in the history of El Clásico (Fitzpatrick, 2013).

Now sixty-two years later, the story of Di Stéfano's transfer to Los Blancos (Real Madrid C.F.'s nickname) still provokes bitter dispute among Catalans (The Times, 2014). Although this dispute ended, many questions remained. What really caused FC Barcelona to fail to reach a deal with Millonarios Fútbol Club S.A.? If FC Barcelona believed in its case, why would the board rip up the contract? Many conspiracies had been rumored during this politically explosive era. Some clues accused one or more of FC Barcelona's negotiators with serving as double agents for Real Madrid C.F. to sabotage the deal and ensure Di Stéfano's move to Madrid (Sanjurjo, 2012). Although General Franco's involvement has never been proved, it changed the entire game, the two clubs, and the history of football forever. Many clues regarded Di Stéfano as something that had been taken away by the central government the same way that they had been deprived of their freedom, political rights, and autonomy for the Catalonia region (El as, 2010).

Thinking about all the glory victories Di Stéfano could have brought to FC Barcelona, the fans still feel angry, disappointed, and bitter about the loss (Sanjurjo, 2012). And so does FC Barcelona. In the club's official website under the history section, it posted "1953. The Di Stéfano Affair" with the sub-headline "In 1953, FC Barcelona signed the Argentinean footballer Alfredo Di Stéfano" (FC Barcelona, 2015). In the article, the club even put a photograph of Di Stéfano wearing a Barcelona jersey next to the team's hero of the moment: the Hungarian-born goalscorer László Kubala. These signs demonstrated FC Barcelona's overly optimistic view of the situation, which humiliated the club and disappointed its supporters. In FC Barcelona's version of history, the club signed Di Stéfano first, and then lost him to "a strange federative manoeuvre



with Francoist backing” (FC Barcelona, 2015). Undoubtedly, Di Stéfano’s transfer to Los Blancos intensified the competition between the two clubs.

“Alfredo Di Stéfano is Real Madrid”: Real Madrid C.F.’s president Florentino Pérez Rodríguez highlighted the fact, when he delivered an emotional tribute after the death of Di Stéfano on July 7, 2014. “His alliance with this club allowed the greatest legend in football to be created. He was decisive, he was determinant, and he changed the destiny of this institution” (Real Madrid C.F., 2014). The president credited Di Stéfano with becoming the biggest dream creator, along with his teammates, during the most difficult times in Spanish history. Pérez praised Di Stéfano for contributing his talent to the club, creating the most admired football club on any continent and spreading his passion for Real Madrid C.F. to every corner of the planet (Real Madrid C.F., 2014). Di Stéfano had become the flagship of the club.

#### 6. Intensifying the rivalry

After the Di Stéfano affair, many internal transfers of players between the clubs have strengthened the rivalry in the last thirty years. In the history of El Clásico since 1902, only 33 players transferred from one team to its rival and served for both clubs: 17 FC Barcelona players switched to Real Madrid C.F. while 3 players did the opposite (Jefferies, 2002). Many clúes considered the transfer of their former vice-captain Luís Filipe Madeira Caeiro Figo to Real Madrid C.F. in 2000 as an unforgivable betrayal. On his return to Barcelona in a Real Madrid jersey in 2002, banners of Judas, curse words, and degrading images filled Camp Nou (Nash, 2000). When Figo touched the ball, noises rose, and people chanted “Traïdor (Traitor)! Judes (Judas)! Escòria (Scum)! Mercenari (Mercenary)” (Sánchez, 2013). Besides the vociferous abuse, missiles of coins, knives,

whisky bottles, and a *cochinillo* (suckling pig) head was thrown at Figo (Tallentire, 2002). This moment, the violence, and the pig's head not only demonstrated the intense rivalry, but also showed the public's attitude towards its long-standing enemy.

The rivalry intensified significantly in 2011 because Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona played against each other four times within 18 days: on April 16 in the league, on April 20 in the Copa del Rey final, on April 27, and on May 3 in the semi-final for UEFA Champions League (Tidey, 2011). Several accusations of unsportsmanlike behavior from both teams and a war of words caused a brawl and four red card penalties (The Telegraph, 2011). Gerard Piqué Bernabeu, a FC Barcelona player, accused José Mário dos Santos Mourinho Félix, a former Real Madrid manager, of destroying Spanish football, since Mourinho overly emphasized on the rivalry, manipulated media, and provoked hatred among fans (The Telegraph, 2011). For example, Mourinho was captured on tape heading towards FC Barcelona's then coach Francesc "Tito" Vilanova i Bayó and poking his eye (Shaw, 2014). Vilanova pushed Mourinho and walked away. Josep "Pep" Guardiola i Sala, a former FC Barcelona player, worried the tension on the pitch might have negative impact off the pitch: "I think it [the brawl/ rivalry] is going too far. It cannot always end well. We must be careful, because one day we will cause harm, not on the field but off, and we're all a little responsible for this" (The Telegraph, 2011). The heated situation also made Spain's head coach Vicente del Bosque González worry that the rising hatred might cause friction in the Spanish national team as the 2012 UEFA European Championship approached (Hunter, 2013).

In 2014, the supporters of both clubs summarized the rivalry as epitomizing the competition between Cristiano Ronaldo dos Santos Aveiro and Lionel Andrés Messi

Cuccittini. The media and fans have compared them together constantly. For instance, the newspapers put both players side by side to comment their performances in El Clásico. In January 2015, Cristiano Ronaldo won his third Ballon d'Or (Golden Globe), an annual FIFA award given to the best male player in the previous calendar year that is awarded based on the votes from national team coaches, captains, and journalists from all over the world (Burnton, 2015). Madridistas think Ronaldo definitely deserved this award due to his accomplishments that included 56 goals in La Liga (BBC, 2015). FC Barcelona's fans suspect the results and claims that Messi should have been awarded (Burnton, 2015). Messi and Ronaldo have dominated this award for the past several years as part of the ongoing rivalry.

As the rivalry continues and the tension escalates, coach Bosque argues, "Spain is a two-team country. Everyone supports either Madrid or Barcelona" (Lowe, 2014). Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas suggests Real Madrid C.F. has 13.2 million fans while FC Barcelona has 10.4 million (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Supporting Bosque's point, Luis Milla Aspas, a professional player who worked for both Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona in his career, claims, "Half of Spain is Madrid, and half is Barcelona" (Lowe, 2014).

## 7. Media and rivalry

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, European football did not attract much public attention and was far from the mass sport. In 1902, only about 2,000 people attended the first El Clásico in the Retiro Park (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Now over 81,000 fans came to Real Madrid's home stadium Estadio Santiago Bernabéu in October 2014 to show their support. More than three million Spaniards watched the game on subscription television,

and nearly 400 million global viewers (three times the size of the global Super Bowl audience) viewed online streaming of the game (Morris, 2015).

Within Spain, although newspapers claim varying degrees of objectivity, the media generate the buzz before and after El Clásico. FC Barcelona has two very supportive newspapers: *El Mundo Deportivo* and *Sport*. Real Madrid C.F. can count on the newspapers *AS* and *Marca*. These newspapers regard themselves as an arm of their clubs, not just propaganda outlets. They consider helping the clubs win as their obligations. The clubs, their fans, and the media have worked together to create or tap into football fundamentalism. One side will tear down whoever holds an opposing view. Bias also lies in the eyes of the beholders. For example, Andoni Zubizarreta Urreta, a former Barcelona goalkeeper, wrote a column for the broadsheet *El País*. Zubizarreta describes this fundamentalism as “we demand accuracy, precision, and objectivity but with one condition: that it is in our favor.”

#### 8. The future of the rivalry

The situation and political environment have changed dramatically over time. Although Catalonia has become the wealthiest region in Spain and has enjoyed significant autonomy since the death of General Franco in 1975, deep mistrust between the region and the central government has remained unchanged. History, politics, and sports have intertwined since the creation of Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona. As time goes by, more complicated questions have begun to emerge. Where do these clubs fit in today's Spanish society? Are these clubs more than sporting institutions? Will the love and hatred surrounding El Clásico continue for another century? What do ordinary fans really think about the rivalry and how do they express of their feeling via the social

medium of Twitter? What factors have kept the rivalry going? Who has engineered and hyped the rivalry and why?

## **B. Methods:**

I decided to use Twitter to hear the voices of ordinary people. The media platform has enormous global recognition with more than 284 million frequent users posting 340 million tweets per day (Keach, 2014). More importantly, as media theorist Douglas Rushkoff says, “Twitter is the first people’s broadcast medium,” which gives everyday people a way to express their opinions (Rushe, 2011).

### **1. Collecting data**

In order to assess the intensity of the rivalry and the attitude of fans towards each other, I collected tweets during the week of the second El Clásico of 2014-2015 season from March 18, 2015 to March 24, 2015 using R and RStudio: “R is an integrated suite of software facilities for data manipulation, calculation, and graphical display. It includes an effective data handling and storage facility, a suite of operators for calculations on arrays, in particular matrices, a large, coherent, integrated collection of intermediate tools for data analysis, graphical facilities for data analysis and display either on-screen or on hardcopy” (R, 2015). I used two major methods to collect the tweets. First, I followed three hashtags respectively: “Real Madrid,” “FCBarcelona,” and “ElClásico,” aiming to gather every tweet that contained these words or hashtags. Second, I used geocoding techniques to abstract all the tweets, which had been posted during this window from both the Madrid region and the Catalonia region separately.

### **2. Data analysis**

First, I will analyze all the tweets, identify key words of each data set, and explore the main factors that have engineered the rivalry. Four major interest groups may benefit from the rivalry and encourage its existence. The potential beneficiaries include the two

clubs, the media, the central government, and separatist groups. Each year, El Clásico brings tremendous revenue to both clubs, reinforces fan bases, retains loyalty, and defines a part of each club's identity. The rivalry also attracts massive global media attention. Spanish sports newspapers sell more copies and gain more profit from advertising. Next, the central government may have used the sports rivalry as a safety valve to let off the steam and reduce tension between supporters of these clubs. The separatist supporters who express their political beliefs in the games may feel satisfied since they demonstrate the Catalonia pride by cursing at Real Madrid C.F.'s players and put up huge pro-independence banners. Therefore, only a few of them may pursue political change, which decreases the threat towards the central government. Finally, separatist groups may also benefit from El Clásico because they may use the rivalry to recruit new members, start riots, cause instability in society, and discredit their enemy: the central government.

### 3. Word Cloud analysis

After collecting all the tweets, I identified the most frequently used words and how many times these words were mentioned in each data set by using R to clean data and create word clouds to visualize the results. This method can help me gain a better understanding of the fan base of each club, the focuses of its conversations, and the implications of results, when the fans followed the three hashtags: "Real Madrid," "FCBarcelona," and "ElClásico."

First, I used R and RStudio to clean data sets, remove all unwanted distractions, and correct corrupt data in order to analyze the most representative samples and produce the most accurate results. I eliminated all the retweets (RT) because they repeat the exact same tweets multiple times. I deleted all text written in Spanish for the purpose of this

Capstone. Although Twitter has around 241 million monthly active users globally, and 78 percent of them tweeted outside of the United States, 51.02% people used English as their primary language on Twitter (Seshagiri, 2014). When discussing ElClásico and communicating with fans globally, most people choose to tweet in English. Looking forward, I will analyze the Spanish tweets for a future project because 13.43% of individuals use Spanish to tweet. Therefore, it has great research potential. Since I wanted to analyze pure text, I got rid of all punctuation, emojis, URLs, uniform resource locators that refer to resources that specifies the location of the resource and consist of the protocol type, the domain name, and the specific web page. I converted all the letters to lowercase to avoid dealing with case sensitivity because, for the purpose of this method, the format does not make that much difference.

Second, I created three lists of stop words for the data sets respectively to predict the words with a high frequency of occurrence that fail to contribute to the accuracy of the results. After removing these distractions, the corpuses should only contain pure lower case text with high relevance to the topic of each hashtag. Third, I used R and RStudio to write the code, process all the commands, and create the word cloud illustrations. For the purpose of this research, I only collected the top 30 most mentioned words. In the word clouds, the font sizes and colors represent different levels of word frequency. Fourth, I calculate how many times these words had been mentioned respectively, identify five key words with sports significance, create word clouds for them, and explore more insights of each fan base. Fifth, in each hashtag data set, I highlight five words with strong political connotations, attempt to figure out if they come up in the conversations related to El Clásico, and analyze how people discuss these



words. These five words include: “independence”, “independencia”, “Catalan”, “Catalonia”, and “Catalunya”. If any term has unusually high frequency, I create a word cloud to understand the premise of its discussion and discover to what extent the fans discuss political beliefs and regional pride during El Clásico. Sixth, I explain and interpret the results for the three hashtags data sets: “Real Madrid,” “FCBarcelona,” and “El Clásico.” Detailed code and word cloud illustrations can be found in the result session.

#### 4. Sentiment analysis:

Then, I conducted a sentiment analysis to examine how fans from the two clubs think of themselves, think of each other, and think about the rivalry. I abstracted all the texts from the three data sets separately. Then, I created two word lists: positive word list and negative word list. The positive consists of 2006 positive words. The latter one has 4783 negative words. R and RStudio read through every tweet, identify these positive and negative words, and give each tweet a sentiment score based on the sum of the positive and negative words. Thirdly, each data set has one sentiment score, which represents the public’s sentiment toward each club and the game.

If the results of the analysis show that the rivalry leans towards mutual hatred, then the Spanish government, the two clubs and the media should acknowledge the delicate situation and prevent it from escalating to violence. Such escalation may endanger the stability of the nation and threaten the legitimacy of the central government. It may lead to violence or another civil war. Therefore, these beneficiaries should be careful while using the rivalry to advance their own interests. If the results suggest that the sentiment seems to be positive, the beneficiaries should maintain current strategies,

especially for the Spanish central government. Maybe these strategies could help to maintain the status quo of the Catalonia region. Last but not least, I want to discover to what extent El Clásico contributes to regional peace and national unity or if it helps separatist groups to expand. Since over 29 European countries have active separatist groups, what I discuss may have relevance to other regional conflicts and governments' decisions to address these issues.

## C. Results:

### 1. Collect Data

First, follow three hashtags: “Real Madrid,” “FCBarcelona,” and “ElClásico”.

Hashtag	Number of tweets
“Real Madrid”	82,006
“FCBarcelona”	218,426
“ElClásico”	100,001

Second, use geocoding techniques to abstract tweets from Madrid and Catalonia regions.

Geocoding	Number of tweets
“Madrid”	4,664
“Catalonia”	2,474

In total, I collected 407, 571 tweets during the week of March 18-24, 2015.

According to the results, more individuals discussed FC Barcelona and El Clásico during the week of El Clásico while more people in Madrid posted tweets on Twitter. The data make sense because FC Barcelona hosted the game on March 22, 2015 in Camp Nou, and the club won the game in the end. Therefore, it has a significant number of tweets. City dwellers are significantly more likely than rural residents to be on Twitter (Sloan, Morgan, Burnap & Williams 2015). Therefore, from the geocoding aspect, more individuals posted tweets in Madrid because it has 3.234 million people living in the metropolitan area while Barcelona has 1.621 million (INE, 2012).

### 2. Clean data:

Consider the cleaning process for Real Madrid’s tweets. First, I created a data frame, which included the 82,006 tweets in RStudio and converted the data frame to Universal Character Set Transformation Formant (UTF-8) to eliminate all the emojis. Second, after deleting the tweets without text, I had 46,936 tweets in the data frame.

Third, I had a corpus of all the valid texts that relate to the discussion of Real Madrid. By getting rid of all the Retweets (RT) and collecting only the English tweets, I had 25, 779 tweets. Fourth, I transformed all the text to lower case and removed all the URLs and punctuation including hash (#). Fifth, I created a list of eight stop words, which have high frequency of occurrence and low relevance, including “ ‘Real Madrid’, ‘realmadrid’, ‘#realmadrid’, ‘@realmadrid’, ‘halamadrid’, ‘realmadriden’, ‘tcorp4gi57vc2’, and ‘tcokgcp7dqpwm’”. The first six terms relate to the club, which most likely would be mentioned numerous times but cannot provide any insights about the fans’ conversations. The last two terms capture the two URLs and random terms that R left behind in the previous step. After eliminating the stop words, I had a corpus of pure text to analyze and produce word clouds. Here is the information for three hashtags after data cleaning.

Hashtags	Number of valid tweets	Number of valid texts in the corpus	Words to remove (Stop words)
“Real Madrid”	46,936	25,779	“Real Madrid”, “realmadrid”, “#realmadrid”, “@realmadrid”, “halamadrid”, “realmadriden”, “tcorp4gi57vc2”, “tcokgcp7dqpwm”
“FC Barcelona”	218,425	71,507	“FCBarcelona”, “#barca”, “#barcelona”, “barcelona”, “barca”, “#cbnews”, “fcblive”, “nou camp”, “#fcb”, “fcbarcelona”, “[fcb]”, “#ibrahimovic”, “#fcblive”, “nocamp”, “nou”, “camp”, “been”, “and”, “you”, “tcocm0iyxycee”, “fcbwallpaper”, “video”, “fcb”
“El Clásico”	53,722	24,497	“FCBarcelona”, “#barca”, “#barcelona”, “barcelona”, “barca”, “#cbnews”, “fcblive”, “nou camp”, “#fcb”, “fcbarcelona”, “[fcb]”, “#ibrahimovic”, “#fcblive”, “nocamp”, “nou”, “camp”, “been”, “and”, “you”, “tcocm0iyxycee”, “fcbwallpaper”, “video”, “fcb”, “Real Madrid”, “realmadrid”, “#realmadrid”, “@realmadrid”, “halamadrid”, “realmadriden”, “tcorp4gi57vc2”,

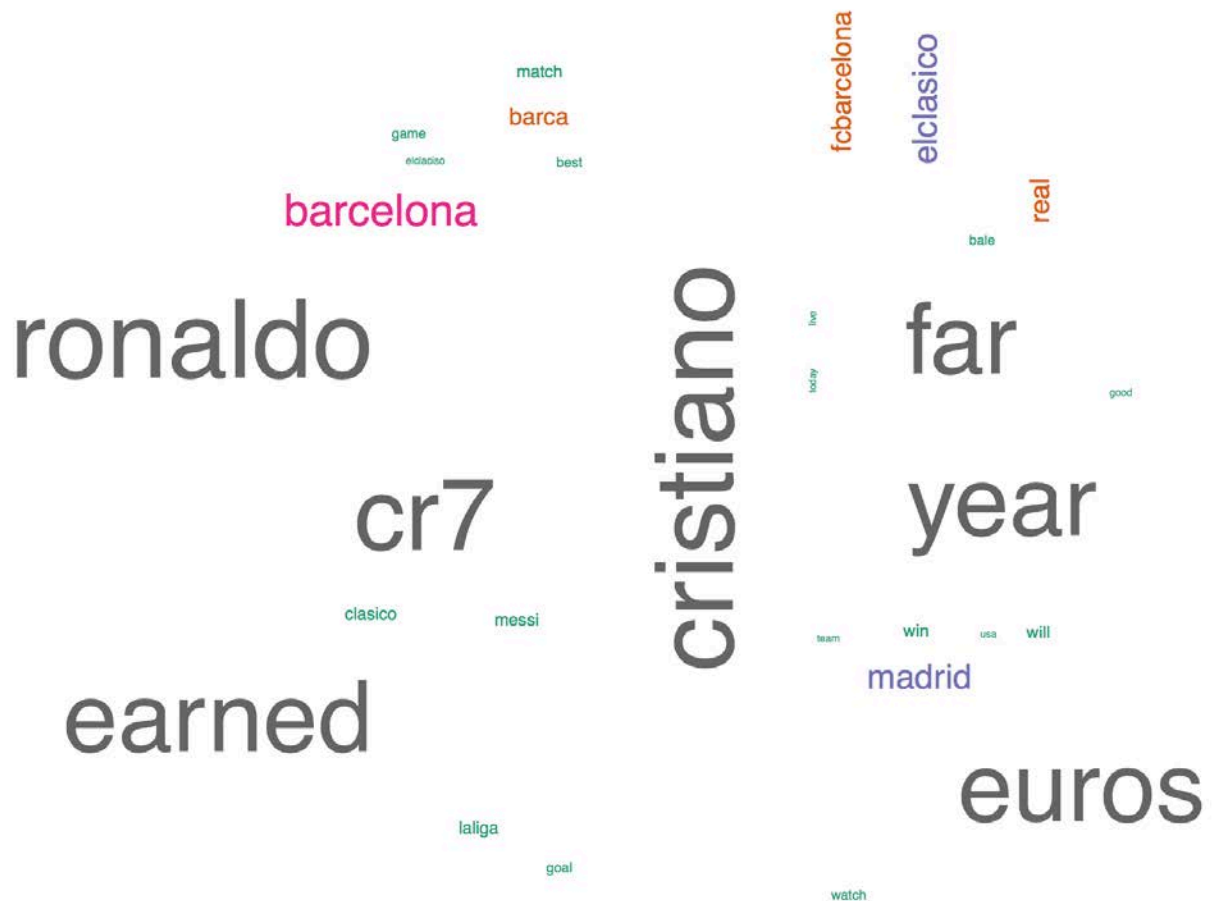
			“tcokgcp7dqpwm”, “ElClasico”, “ElClásico”, “El Clasico”, “El Clásico”
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### 3. Word Cloud Results:

I collected the top 30 most mentioned words in each data set and classified them by six colors and different font sizes. The bigger the font sizes, the more frequently the words occur. This session includes three major parts divided by the three hashtags: “Real Madrid,” “FCBarcelona,” and “El Clásico”. Each subsection consists of a word cloud image of the top 30 mentioned words, the frequencies of each word, the five words with sports significance, the five political words, and their frequencies.

#### A). Real Madrid Session

##### A.1. Word Cloud image



## A.2. Frequencies of the top 30 most mentioned words:

“Real Madrid”	Terms	Mentioned times
<b>1<sup>st</sup> tier - Black (Most mentioned): 7 words</b>	“Cristiano”	8877
	“Ronaldo”	8866
	“CR7”	8327
	“Year”	8023
	“Far”	7960
	“Earned”	7907
	“Euros”	7879
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> tier - Dark Green: 0 word</b>	N/A	N/A
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> tier - Pink: 1 word</b>	“Barcelona”	5700
<b>4<sup>th</sup> tier - Light Purple: 2 words</b>	“Madrid”	252547
	“El Clásico”	3355
<b>5<sup>th</sup> tier - Orange: 3 words</b>	“Real”	25191
	“FCBarcelona”	2110
	“Barca”	1618
<b>6<sup>th</sup> tier – Light Green: 17 words</b>	“El Clásico”	2438
	“Clásico”	2355
	“Win”	1485
	“Live”	1451
	“Goal”	1137
	“Messi”	1065
	“Match”	1056
	“Game”	962
	“Bale”	939
	“Will”	914
	“Watch”	897
	“Best”	650
	“Team”	648
	“Today”	583
	“USA”	537
	“Good”	489

The results show a general idea about what people said about Real Madrid during the El Clásico week. The most mentioned terms were “Cristiano” “Ronaldo,” his brand, and how much he earned every year. As a successful professional football player who has great talent and is a fashion icon, Cristiano Ronaldo has been the focus of both the sports

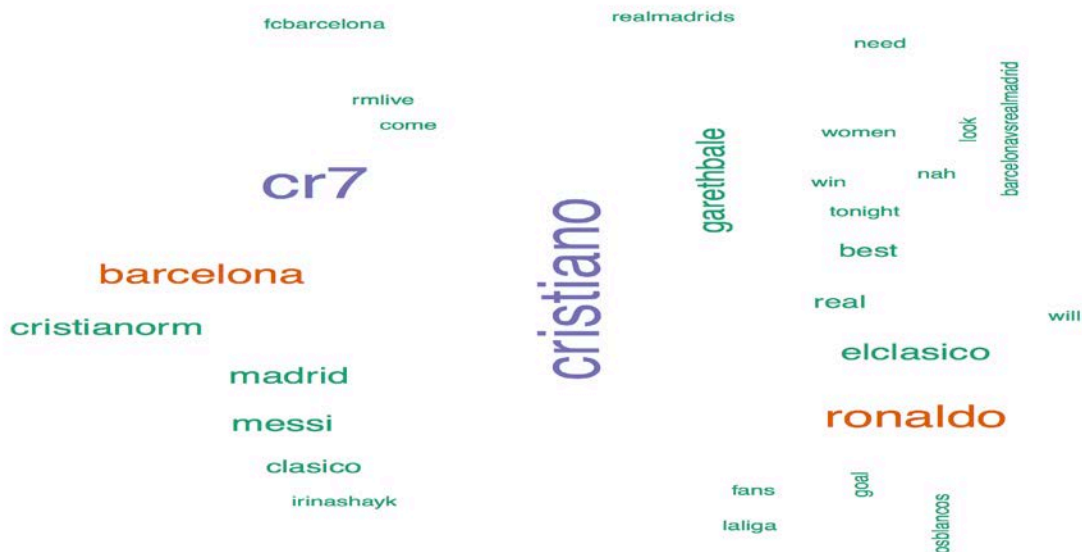
world and entertainment world. Fans also discussed the El Clásico game, Barcelona, and FC Barcelona very often. However, from this chart, the audience could not distinguish whether the fans were talking about the city of Barcelona or FC Barcelona when they mentioned the term “Barcelona.” Therefore, I created the word cloud images for both terms. These images can provide more details about the conversations. Interestingly, “USA” showed as one of the 30 most mentioned words. It surprised me the most because compared to many European countries such as Spain, Germany, and Italy, the U.S. has expressed less enthusiasm towards European football. Hence, by creating a word cloud, I may gain a better understanding of why would fans talk about “USA” during the week of El Clásico.

#### A.3. Five words with sports significance for Real Madrid:

1.	“Cristiano Ronaldo”
2.	“Barcelona”
3.	“FCBarcelona”
4.	“El Clásico”
5.	“USA”

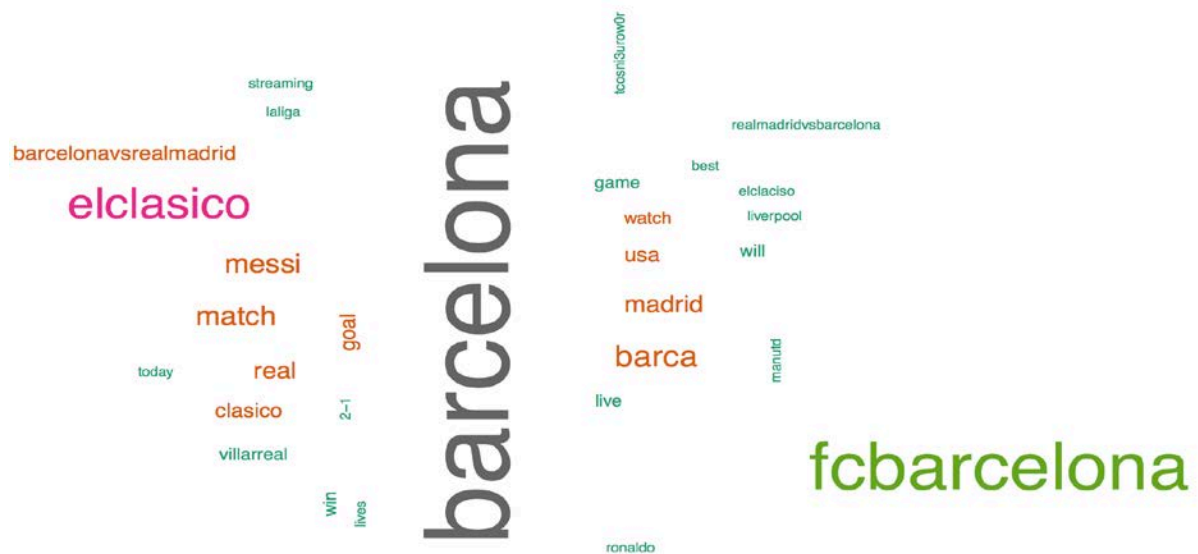
#### A.4. Word clouds for these five terms:

##### A.4.1. “Cristiano Ronaldo”



This image shows that when fans talked about Cristiano Ronaldo, they mentioned him mostly in topics related to sports. Some of the most frequent terms include: “La Liga,” “fans,” “Los Blancos” (nickname for Real Madrid supporters), “realmadrids,” “El Clásico,” “goal,” “greatbale,” and “win.” In reflection of the rivalry, many fans mentioned his name with the following terms: “FC Barcelona,” “Messi,” and “BarcelonaVsRealMadrid.” Lastly, people also talked about his “look,” “women,” and his ex-girlfriend “Irina Shayk.” Many fans expressed their interests in Cristiano Ronaldo’s professional life and personal life. Therefore, his name showed up as the most mentioned term in this data set.

#### A.4.2. “Barcelona”



This image indicates that when fans talk about Real Madrid and Barcelona at the same time, their conversations revolve around the rivalry between “FC Barcelona” and “Real Madrid” and ongoing competition between “Messi” and “Ronaldo.” Other El



Clásico- related terms include: “RealmadridVsBarcelona,” “BarcelonaVsRealMadrid,” “Barca,” “La Liga,” “win,” “best,” “game,” “2-1,” and “goal.” Some fans also mentioned three other football clubs during the conversations: “Villarreal,” “Manutd,” and “Liverpool.” The first club, Villarreal Club de Fútbol, S.A.D., a Spanish football club based in Vila-real, Valencian Community, had a game on the same day as El Clásico on March 22, 2015. The latter two teams, Manchester United Football Club and Liverpool Football Club, are two professional football clubs of the British Premier League and played against each other also on March 22, 2015. Moreover, these two teams have a longstanding love-hate relationship as neighbors, enemies, and are the two most popular football clubs in England. Most interestingly, Cristiano Ronaldo played for Manchester United for seven years before joining Real Madrid C.F. in 2009. In this situation, people referred to “FC Barcelona” as “Barcelona”, and used the two terms interchangeably.

#### A.4.3. “FCBarcelona”



The image demonstrates similar results as the word cloud for “Barcelona” in conversations related to sports. Many people mentioned the rivalry between the two clubs

and the two prominent players: “Messi” and “Ronaldo”. However, many people also discussed games beyond La Liga such as “FIFA” (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), “2022,” “World,” “Cup,” and “wc2022indonesia” (2022 Indonesia FIFA World Cup bid). I did not expect these terms to come up in the conversations related to El Clásico. These people not only followed the Real Madrid hashtag to discuss FC Barcelona but also brought out such interesting terms. They showed tremendous interest in El Clásico.

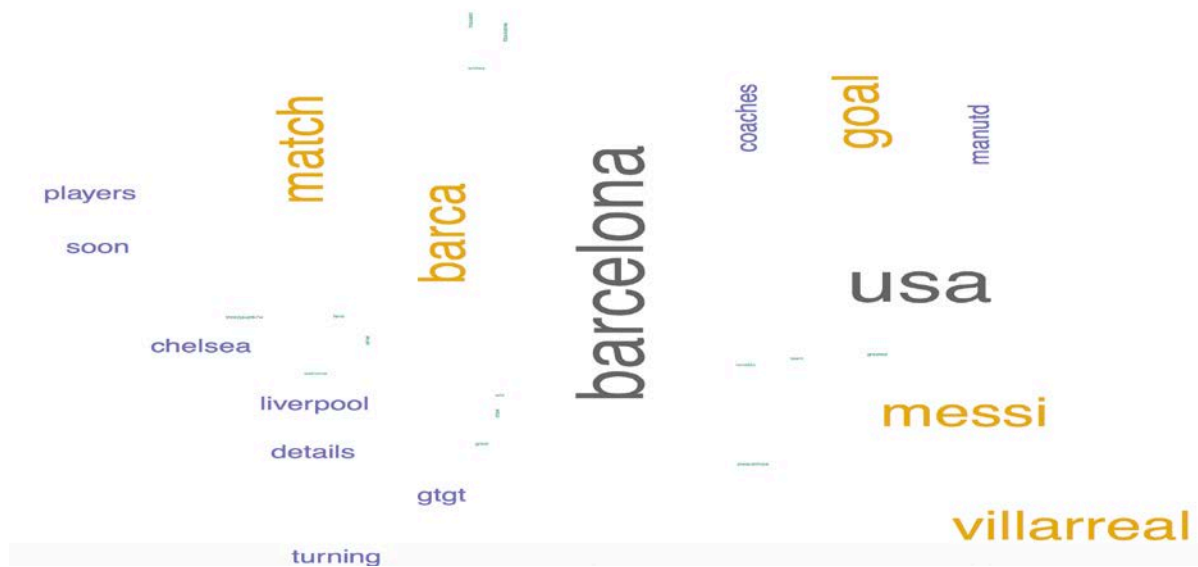
However, I do think the appearance of these terms makes sense. Both Real Madrid C. F. and FC Barcelona have numerous fans in the Republic of Indonesia. FC Barcelona has an official twitter account for its Indonesian fans. The account was created in March 2013, has posted 6, 266 tweets, and has 225,000 followers. Real Madrid C.F. does not have an official twitter account for the Indonesian fans. But they also have a very strong presence and created Peña RM de Indonesia, the official twitter of Real Madrid supporters in Indonesia. It was created in December 2009, has posted more than 154, 000 tweets, and has over 214,000 followers. The official twitter account of Iker Casillas Fernández, the captain and the goalkeeper of both Real Madrid C.F. and the Spanish national team, also followed this fan page. Both clubs paid great attention to their Indonesia fan bases in different ways. Indonesia had bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, but FIFA rejected the bid on March 19, 2010 due to lack of government guarantees and support from the local people (BBC, 2010). Five years later, people still discussed this bid during the week of El Clásico.

#### A.4.4. “El Clásico”



This image shows most fans who used Twitter to discuss El Clásico and followed the Real Madrid hashtag cared the most about the rivalry itself. Many supporters also mentioned “Barcelona,” “fcbarcelona,” “BarcelonaVsRealMadrid,” and “barca,” which reflected the intensity of the long-lasting rivalry. Some fans continued to talk about “Messi” and “Ronaldo” while others expressed their excitement by tweeting “excited” and using the hashtag “elclasicocountdown.” All terms in the word cloud have good reasons to be there, and the data make sense.

#### A.4.5. “USA”



This image demonstrates that when fans talked about Real Madrid and USA together during El Clásico, they also mentioned many other famous football clubs such as Chelsea Football Club, Liverpool Football Club, Manchester United Football Club, and Villarreal Club de Fútbol, S.A.D. Honestly, I did not expect the term “USA” to come up in the first place, but the appearance of these clubs made the word cloud event more fascinating. Both Madrid C.F. and FCBarcelona have toured the U.S. in the past several years for both training sessions and competing in the International Campaigns Cup (ICC), a scheduled series of friendly association football tournaments. This year the ICC will be hosted separately in Australia, China, and the U.S. Some games in the U.S. edition will be played in Mexico, Canada, Italy and England (ICC, 2015). Chelsea Football Club, Liverpool Football Club, Manchester United Football Club, and FC Barcelona will play the ICC matches in the U.S. edition while Real Madrid C.F. plays in games in Australia. Supporters of both clubs were excited about the ICC games in the summer of 2015. The word cloud also shows that football games and culture have become more prevalent in

the U.S. Although the games may be neither intense nor reinforce the rivalry, all the mentioned clubs will benefit from these games and international travels tremendously.

#### A.5. Five words with political significance

1.	“Independence”
2.	“Independencia”
3.	“Catalan”
4.	“Catalonia”
5.	“Catalunya”

A.5.1. “Independence” and A.5.2. “Independencia” came back empty with no mentions.

#### A.5.3. “Catalan”



Among all the people who followed the Real Madrid hashtag during the week of El Clásico, only 13 tweets mentioned both Catalan and Real Madrid. As showed in the image, most the terms talked about the game itself. “2-1” referred to the final score of the game: FC Barcelona edged out Real Madrid C. F. The second score was contributed by Luis Alberto Suárez Díaz and changed the game. Marcel Avelino, an Indonesian user, included a Daily Mail article in his tweets which stated that: “Luis Suarez scores El Clásico winner to send Catalans four points clear in La Liga title race” (Jenson, 2015).

Davie\_PUP, a fan of Real Madrid and a supporter of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) in Northern Ireland, posted, “Good luck @realmadrid tear shreds off those Catalan scumbags!” I can totally imagine a hardcore Real Madrid fan posting a tweet like this. It surprised me that this person was not even from Madrid, but expressed such a strong feeling with political connotation. Then, I researched about the PUP, which was for a time the only left-wing party of unionism in Northern Ireland. Interestingly, Davie\_PUP, did not support the left-wing separatist values associated with FC Barcelona. He showed the loyalty to the right-wing nationalism of Real Madrid C.F. It is fascinating that sports bring people with different political views together to enjoy the same game. Sometimes, sports also make fans support a team regardless of its political view.

#### A.5.4. “Catalonia”



barcelona

catalonia

This image demonstrates that when fans mentioned “Catalonia” and followed the Real Madrid hashtag during the El Clásico week, they also talked about “Barcelona” very often. This result makes sense because it reflects the reality that FCBarcelona supports the value of Catalonia, its language, its culture, and its political belief. When talking

about the rivalry and its enemy Real Madrid, the controversy of independence and competition on and off the pitch become more vivid and heated. Although only six tweets contained both “Catalonia” and “Real Madrid,” the implication of these tweets has great significance. Bashar Isham AlAssad, a Syrian soldier and FC Barcelona fan, tweeted, “#Barcelona (2-1) # Real Madrid at camp nou #Barcelona, # catalunya. # freecatalonia.” The user showed great enthusiasm towards FCBarcelona and support for the freedom of Catalonia.

On the game day, Jordi Solé, a supporter of FCBarcelona and a proud Catalan musician, posted “@mmmbcn @realmadrid @freed4Catalonia @miriamnoguerasM @MnicaRebullCome @moncapsa @MBDUI @PereForcada @elgatnegre007 @Laksmiz #PROU violents!” Jordi Solé created the hashtag #PROU, which means “enough” in Catalan, to promote the independence of Catalonia. In his tweet, Solé tagged many of his fellow Catalonians such as MMM ANC Lliure, a lawyer, theologian, scientist, entrepreneur, and a professor of University of Barcelona. Many of the accounts that Solé mentioned in his tweets have explicit information about supporting Catalonia’s independence. For example, Freedom Catalonia (@freed4Catalonia) asks its follower to “keep calm and speak Catalan.” In the description, it says in Catalan, “Al nostre estil, sense armes, amb paraules i rauxa, ningú no ens parerà, ha arribat el moment! / In our style, without arms, with words and rapture, nobody will stop us, the time has come!” Pere Forcada (@Pere Forcada) wrote in his biography: “Ex-federalista. Luchando para dejar un país mejor a mis hijos. / Struggling to leave a better country for my children. Although sports bring fans of different teams together, the same political beliefs bond people closer. Although these tweets with political connotations did not occur in great

numbers, they indicated that some fans did express their political belief through the conversation of sports. Twitter does not recognize Catalan as one of its 26 official languages; therefore, R and RStudio might not be able to collect these tweets written in Catalan. Furthermore, for the purpose of this Capstone, I only analyzed the English tweets. Hence, some Catalan or Spanish tweets might be screened out of the corpus.

#### A.5.5. “Catalunya”



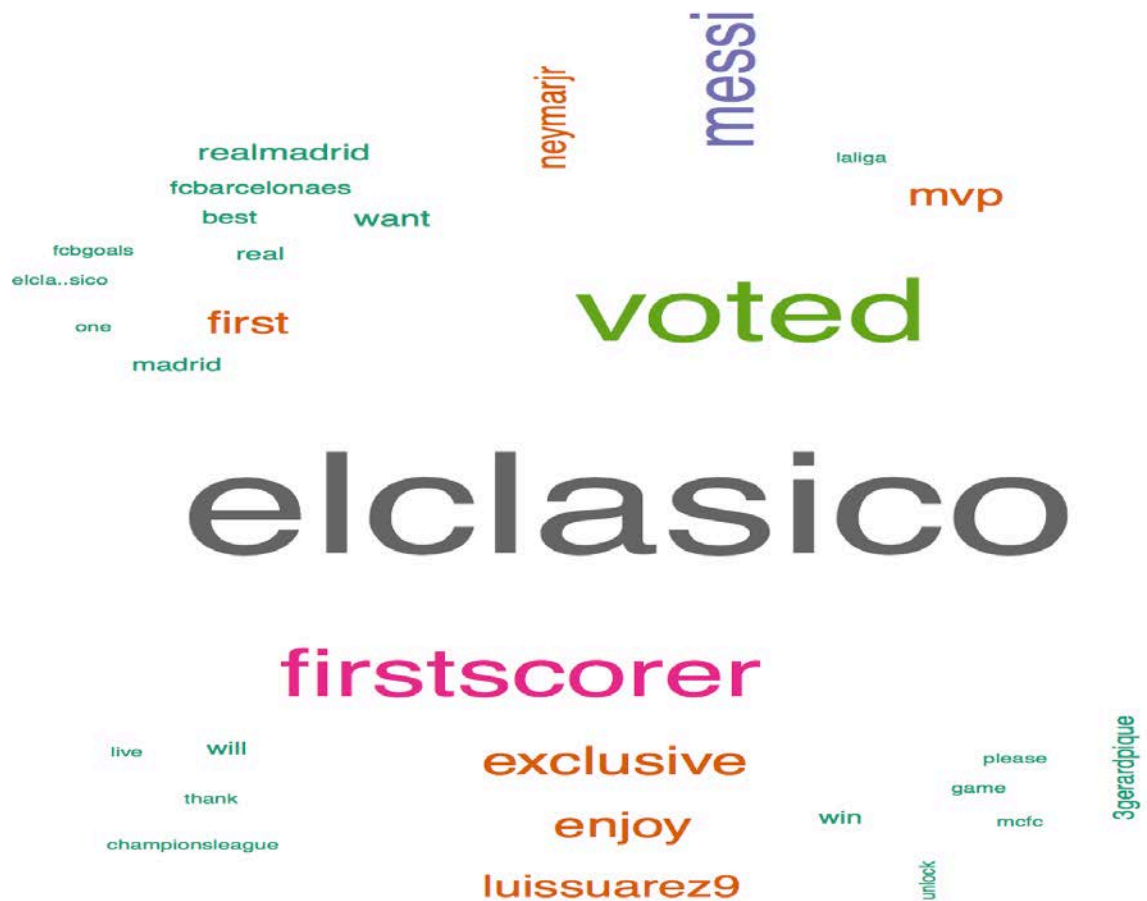
Catalunya means Catalonia in the Catalan language. The image shows that some FCBarcelona fans, who followed the Real Madrid hashtag and mentioned “Catalunya,” mostly discussed the rivalry, the best players in the game, and rooted for the club. FC Barcelona fans used “viscaelbarca” (long live Barca), “viscacatalunya” (long live Catalunya), and “viscabarca” (long live Barca) interchangeably, which demonstrated the intertwined relationship between FC Barcelona and the Catalunya region. One tweet from Giofanni R Dhuha, an Indonesian FCBarcelona supporter, caught my attention, when I tried to understand why “burn” would show up in the image. Dhuha tweeted: “Let's go @FCBarcelona !!! Burn @realmadrid to the ground !!! #ViscaBarca #ViscaCatalunya.”



He described himself as a “proud and die-hard fan of @FCBarcelona.” However, he did not follow anyone who supported the Catalonia’s Independence on Twitter. Therefore, his tweet only expressed his opinion of the El Clásico game.

## B). FC Barcelona Session

### B.1. Word Cloud image



B.2. Frequencies of the top 30 most mentioned words:

<b>“FC Barcelona”</b>	Terms	Times Mentioned
<b>1<sup>st</sup> tier - Black (Most mentioned): 1 word</b>	“El Clásico”	31903
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> tier - Dark Green: 1 word</b>	“Voted”	19124
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> tier - Pink: 1 word</b>	“Firstscorer”	14383
<b>4<sup>th</sup> tier - Light Purple: 1 word</b>	“Messi”	11887
<b>5<sup>th</sup> tier - Orange: 6 words</b>	“First”	20119
	“Exclusive”	7648
	“Enjoy”	6321
	“MVP”	5317
	“Luis Suarez”	5516
	“Neymar Jr”	4517
<b>6<sup>th</sup> tier – Light Green: 20 words</b>	“El Clásico”	32797
	“Madrid”	7321
	“Real”	7126
	“Real Madrid”	4710
	“Want”	3813
	“Live”	3660
	“One”	3234
	“Win”	2919
	“Thank”	2807
	“3 Gerard Pique”	2581
	“Best”	2279
	“Will”	2088
	“Game”	1817
	“Please”	1672
	“FCB goals”	1588
	“Champions League”	1576
	“La Liga”	1514
	“Unlock”	1400
	“MCFC”	1318
	“fcbarcelonaes”	N/A

The results provide a general idea about what people discussed during the El Clásico week, when they followed the FC Barcelona hashtag. A total of 31,903 tweets talked about the game itself. This data makes sense because El Clásico has more than 400 million viewers on the planet and has global influence. Moreover, more FC Barcelona fans might tweet in English because some of them refused to use Spanish as a way of

showing the Catalan pride. Since I collected and analyzed the English tweets for this project, the data set had a larger number than the previous one. Fans also mentioned the stars on the team: Messi, Suarez, and Neymar. It surprised me that “Real Madrid” did not come up as one of the 10 most mentioned terms. As a Madridista (Real Madrid C.F. fan), I had been under the impression that Madridistas could not care less about FC Barcelona and laughed at clúes’ obsession with us. Real Madrid C.F. fans said clúes suffered “madriditis,” a chronic persecution complex. The symptoms include an inability to live their own lives, and constantly focus on every movement of Real Madrid C.F. instead of themselves. José Martínez Sánchez, one of the greatest Spanish footballers ever, who played for the Whites for 16 years, confirmed the statement of Madridistas that FC Barcelona did hang on every move of Los Bancos. He says, “We did not care about them. Why would we?” (Lowe, 2014). However, the results show that FC Barcelona may have changed in past years and has not paid constant attention to Real Madrid C.F.

### B.3. Five words with sports significance for FC Barcelona:

1.	“El Clásico”
2.	“Messi”
3.	“Madrid”
4.	“Real Madrid”
5.	“Voted”

### B.4. Word clouds for these five terms:

#### B.4.1. “El Clásico”



firstscorer

elclasico

messi

voted

mvp  
teamlead  
please  
player  
first  
ronaldo  
madrid  
elclasico  
better  
reply  
best  
wallpaper  
championsleague  
neymar  
suarez  
will  
one  
neymarjr  
lionel  
fatgoals

#### B.4.3. “Madrid” and B.4.4. “Real Madrid”



This image indicates that when fans followed the FC Barcelona hashtag and discussed Real Madrid, the focus of conversations concentrated on “Real Madrid” and “El Clásico.” Interestingly, “realmadriden” showed as a crucial term in the word cloud. It is worth mentioning that both Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona have multiple official accounts in different languages on Twitter.

#### Real Madrid C.F.’s different Twitter accounts

Club Twitter name handle	Language	Number of Tweets	Followers
@realmadrid	Spanish	46.3 K	15.7 Million
@realmadriden	English	21.8 K	5.28 Million
@realmadridarab	Arabic	14.6 K	2.81 Million
@realmadridjapan	Japanese	13.1 K	139 K
@realmadridfra	French	225	19.3K

#### FC Barcelona’s different Twitter accounts

Club Twitter name handle	Language	Number of Tweets	Followers
@FCBarcelona	English	61.3 K	14.8 Million
@FCBarcelona_es	Spanish	61.2 K	8.04 Million
@FCBarcelona_cat	Catalan	51.1 K	4.89 Million
@FCBarcelona_br	Portuguese	14.9 K	247 K
@FCBarcelona_ara	Arabic	7, 273	229 K
@FCBarcelona_id	Indonesia	6, 266	225 K
@FCBarcelona_fra	French	9, 571	167 K
@FCBarcelona_jap	Japanese	8, 078	135 K

According to the number of the tweets and followers, Real Madrid’s primary account should be “@realmadrid” which uses Spanish as the main language to communicate. Surprisingly, as much as FC Barcelona claims its Catalan identity, its primary targets are English-speaking fans. The Catalan account ranks the third among its eight accounts and has many fewer followers than its Spanish account. In the word cloud, “realmadriden” appeared, which might suggest that more English speaking fans tweeted some content about the club and the game following the FC Barcelona hashtag.



B.5.1. “Independence” and B.5.2. “Independencia” came back empty with no mentions.





California for their school. “josecatalan,” a FC Barcelona fan, predicted the results of the game as 3-1 on Twitter. His friend “exdgr” responded, “@JoseCatalan\_: My prediction: @FCBarcelona takes an L (loss).” They had a polite disagreement. It is interesting to see that two American teenagers have great passion for European football and El Clásico. However, some Madridista had the urge to express his frustration about the game. Ámro, a supporter of Real Madrid and a die-hard fan of Gareth Frank Bale, posted “Bale fucking deserved a goal, fucking referees always helping Catalan fuckboys, puta (fuck).@FCBarcelona.” Ámro only tagged @FCBarcelona in his tweet to ensure the club got his message with strong feelings.

#### A.5.4. “Catalonia”



visca

elclasico

catalonia

spain

This image demonstrates that when fans mentioned “Catalonia” and followed the FC Barcelona hashtag during the El Clásico week, they mostly talked about “Visca” (Long Live), “Spain,” and “El Clásico.” Although only 23 tweets contained both FC Barcelona and “Catalonia,” each of them had a strong political purpose. For example,

more than ten tweets say, “Catalonia is not Spain.” Javier Yearson, an Argentinian journalist and FC Barcelona, tweeted, “Tomorrow: Catalonia against the Spanish Empire.” Yearson highlighted the ideologies and class difference in El Clásico. Moreover, a FC Barcelona fan, Laksmí, tweeted, ““Whistling National Anthem Worse Than Booing Ronaldo”

<http://www.goal.com/en/news/12/spain/2015/03/21/10044332/whistling-national-anthem-worse-than-booing-ronaldo> ... #FreedomCatalonia2015 #Barça #FCBlive @FCBarcelona.” The article explains why Real Madrid C.F. showed reluctance to stage the Copa del Rey final game, although FC Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao wanted to play the game at the Whites’ home stadium Estadio Santiago Bernabéu. Fenn argues, “Whistling during Spain’s national anthem is worse than booing Cristiano Ronaldo, according to LFP president Javier Tebas, who fears more controversy during the Copa del Rey final” (Fenn, 2015). For instance, in 1997, FC Barcelona won the Copa del Rey against Real Betis at Estadio Santiago Bernabéu. Clúes considered this victory very special because the club won the game at its rival’s home stadium. After the game, then president Gaspart asked the stadium to play the Barcelona hymn over the loudspeakers five times. He says, “I wouldn’t have done if the final had been at any other ground” (Lowe, 2014). Therefore, Real Madrid C.F. aims to stay out of any controversial involvement.

#### A.5.5. “Catalunya”



The image shows that many FCBarcelona fans mentioned “Catalunya” in their tweets to discuss the rivalry, the best players in the game, and rooted for the club. FC Barcelona fans used “viscaelbarca” (long live Barca), “viscacatalunya” (long live Catalunya), “viscabarca” (long live Barca) “viscaelbarcayaviscacatalunya” (long live Barca and long live Catalunya), and “mes que un club” (more than just a club) interchangeably, which not only reflected that FC Barcelona represents Catalunya culture, but also showed the enthusiasm of the clués. For instance, Sunshine Morning (@RememberMessi) tweeted, “Woke up 5 hours earlier today morning. So excited for #ElClasico biggest game in football world #ViscaBarca #ViscaCatalunya #5-0 Barcelona.” This tweet not only showed the fan’s excitement for the game, but also demonstrated his or her support for Catalunya and FC Barcelona.

## C). El Clásico Session

### C.1. El Clásico Word Cloud image



C.2. Frequencies of the top 30 most mentioned words:

<b>“El Clásico”</b>	Terms	Times Mentioned
<b>1<sup>st</sup> tier - Black (Most mentioned): 1 word</b>	“El Clásico”	24474
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> tier - Dark Green: 2 words</b>	“Voted”	12748
	“Firstscorer”	12721
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> tier - Pink: 0 word</b>	N/A	N/A
<b>4<sup>th</sup> tier - Light Purple: 1 word</b>	“Messi”	6860
<b>5<sup>th</sup> tier - Orange: 1 word</b>	“Neymarjr”,	3400
<b>6<sup>th</sup> tier – Light Green: 25 words</b>	“Clásico”	24474
	“Luissuarez9”	3002
	“Madrid”	2824
	“Day”	2253
	“Real”	2035
	“Want”	1886
	“FCBgoals”	1301
	“Exclusive”	1285
	“Unlock”	1211
	“Will”	842
	“Wait”	831
	“Today”	799
	“Win”	742
	“Tomorrow”	688
	“Reply”	649
	“Sunday”	605
	“Game”	569
	“Think”	564
	“Tonight”	530
	“Better”	463
	“BBC”	397
	“Ronaldo”	396
	“MSN”	382
	“Hours”	348
	“Cant”	108

The image shows the focuses of fans’ conversation during the week of the game, when they followed the El Clásico hashtag. A total of 24, 474 tweets talked about the game itself. Similar to the results of the FC Barcelona data set, the supporters not only discussed the famous players such as “Messi,” “Suarez,” “Ronaldo,” and “Neymar,” but also debated who they should “vote” for as the “firstscorer.” Many terms came up

repeatedly in the previous word clouds such as “unlock,” “exclusive,” and “reply,” which referred to the social media campaign FC Barcelona’s official Twitter account launched during the game to interact with the fans. “Real Madrid” and “FC Barcelona” also showed up multiple times, which makes sense because the two clubs have been part of the “El Clásico.” Individuals could not discuss the game without mentioning the two giants. Interestingly, fans also compared “BBC” and “MSN,” the two powerful cooperation units within the two teams. “BBC” refers to three players in Real Madrid C.F.: Gareth Frank Bale, Karim Mostafa Benzema, and Cristiano Ronaldo. “MSN” also refers to three players in FC Barcelona: Messi, Suarez, and Neymar. It is interesting to see that the fans discussed these two units together and expanded the primary competitions between Ronaldo and Messi to the two groups.

### C.3. Two words with sports significance for El Clásico:

1.	“BBC”
2.	“MSN”

### C.4. Word clouds for these two terms:

#### C.4.1. “BBC”



### C.4.2. “MSN”



These images show that the word clouds of both “MSN” and “BBC” look very similar, which suggested that fans always talked about these two at the same time. The supporters mentioned “BBC” 476 times while 417 tweets contained “MSN.” The conversations revolving around the two groups relate mostly to sports and the game. Fans compared these two units while discussing “Real Madrid” and “FC Barcelona.” All terms that showed up in these two illustrations make sense. Although people can feel the competition, none of these terms showed any political connotations.

### C.5. Five words with political significance

1.	“Independence”
2.	“Independencia”
3.	“Catalan”
4.	“Catalonia”
5.	“Catalunya”

C.5.1. “Independence” and B.5.2. “Independencia” came back empty with no mentions.

C.5.3. “Catalan” has eight mentions. C.5.4. “Catalonia” has six mentions. C.5.5.

“Catalunya” has 13 mentions.

Surprisingly, only a few people mentioned these words with political significance following the El Clásico hashtag. The possible explanation might be that most of the people who enjoyed discussing such topic would be the clués. Due to the series of social media campaigns FC Barcelona launched, most of the clués participated in the activities and followed the three hashtags the official accounts created. Therefore, the instances of the El Clásico hashtag talking about independence and Catalunya remained low.

Language could be another reason. Most clués might tweet in Catalan or Spanish, which got screened out from the data for the purpose of this project.

#### 4. Sentiment results

##### A). Real Madrid Session

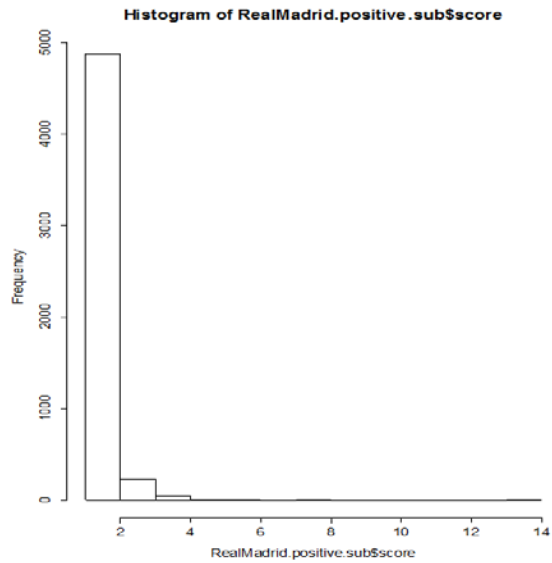
###### A. 1. Sentiment score

Data		
RealMadrid_SM.scores.df	25777 obs. of 2 variables	
RealMadrid.negative.sub	2057 obs. of 2 variables	
RealMadrid.neutral.sub	25777 obs. of 2 variables	
RealMadrid.positive.sub	5221 obs. of 2 variables	
RealMadridcorpusDF	25777 obs. of 1 variables	
Values		
neg.words	chr [1:4783] "2-faced" "2-faces" "abnormal" "abolish" "abominable" "abominably" "abominate" ...	
pos.words	chr [1:2006] "a+" "abound" "abounds" "abundance" "abundant" "accessable" "accessible" "acclaim" ...	
RealMadrid_SM.score	0.168871474570353	
RealMadrid_SM.text	Large character (25777 elements, 3.5 Mb)	

The image shows that Real Madrid had 2057 negative mentions, 25,777 neutral mentions, and 5, 221 positive mention. The final sentiment score is 0.168871474570353, which reflects a positive result. This score indicates when people talked about Real Madrid C.F. most of them have a neutral to slightly positive view towards the club.

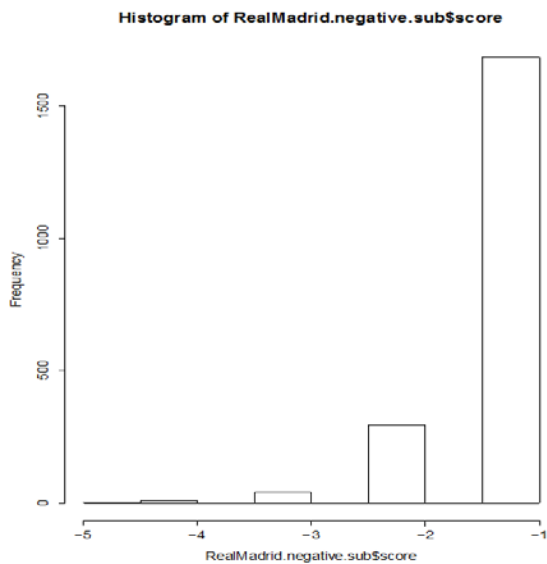
###### A. 2. Histogram of Real Madrid C.F. positive score





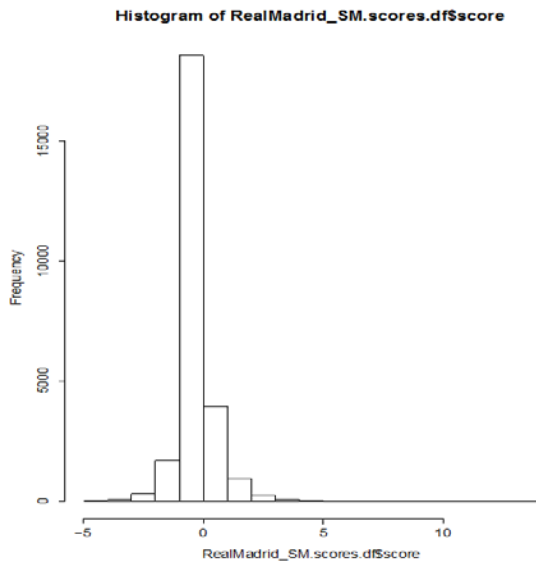
The image shows the highest positive score is 14 and most tweets have scores between 1 and 2. Most tweets showed positive feelings towards the Whites.

### A.3. Histogram of Real Madrid C.F. negative score



The image shows the lowest negative score is -5 and most tweets have scores between -1 and -2. Therefore, most tweets contained a slightly negative view of the club.

#### A. 4. Histogram of Real Madrid C.F. sentiment score



The image shows the normal distribution of Real Madrid C.F.'s sentiment score, which confirms the accuracy of the results.

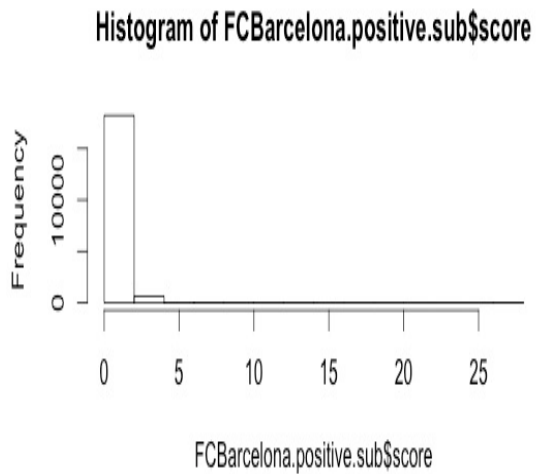
#### B). FC Barcelona Session

##### B. 1. Sentiment score

Data		
▶ FCBarcelona_SM.scor...	71507 obs. of 2 variables	
▶ FCBarcelona.negative...	3397 obs. of 2 variables	
▶ FCBarcelona.neutral...	71507 obs. of 2 variables	
▶ FCBarcelona.positive...	18872 obs. of 2 variables	
▶ FCBarcelona.corpusDF	71507 obs. of 1 variables	
Values		
▶ FCBarcelona_SM.text	Large character (71507 elements, 6.9 Mb)	
neg.words	chr [1:4783] "2-faced" "2-faces" "abnormal" "abolish" ...	
pos.words	chr [1:2006] "a+" "abound" "abounds" "abundance" "abun..."	

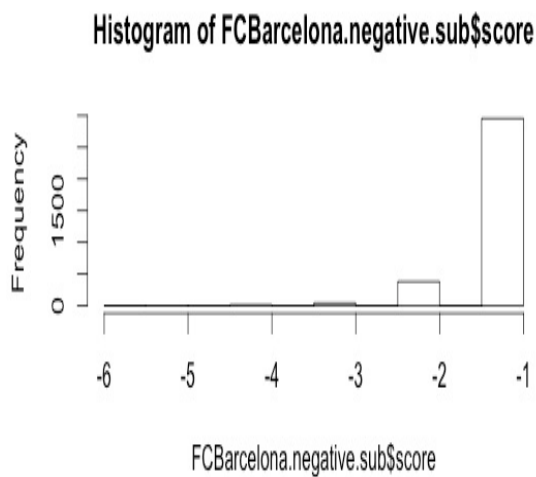
The image shows that FC Barcelona had 3, 397 negative mentions, 71, 507 neutral mentions, and 18, 872 positive mentions. The final sentiment score is 0.309675975778595, which reflects a positive result. This score indicates that when people talked about FC Barcelona most of them had a neutral to positive view towards the club.

### B. 2. Histogram of FC Barcelona positive score



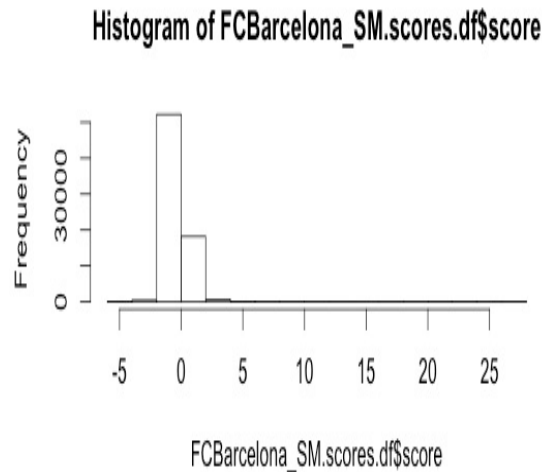
The image shows the highest positive score is 25 and most tweets have scores between 1 and 4. Most tweets showed positive feelings towards FC Barcelona.

### B.3. Histogram of FC Barcelona negative score



The image shows the lowest negative score is -6 and most tweets have scores between -1 and -2. Therefore, most tweets contained a slightly negative view of the club.

#### B. 4. Histogram of FC Barcelona sentiment score



The image shows the normal distribution of FC Barcelona's sentiment score, which confirms the accuracy of the results.

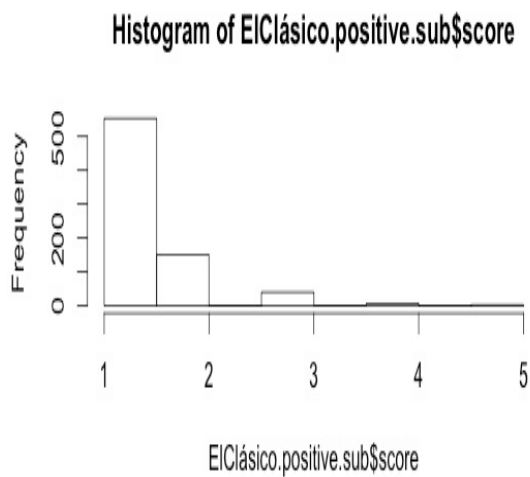
### C). El Clásico Session

#### C. 1. Sentiment score

Data	
ElClásico_SM.scores.df	2241 obs. of 2 variables
ElClásico.negative.sub	359 obs. of 2 variables
ElClásico.neutral.sub	2241 obs. of 2 variables
ElClásico.positive.sub	753 obs. of 2 variables
ElClásicocorpusDF	2241 obs. of 1 variables
Values	
ElClásico_SM.score	0.247657295850067
ElClásico_SM.text	Factor w/ 2209 levels " elclasico""  __truncated__,...: 1693 2051 444 2092 68 1832 509 1675 1375 784 ...
neg.words	chr [1:4783] "2-faced" "2-faces" "abnormal" "abolish" ...
pos.words	chr [1:2006] "a+" "abound" "abounds" "abundance" "abundant" ...

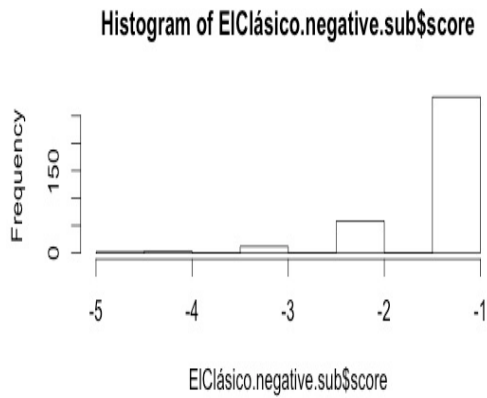
The image shows that El Clásico had 359 negative mentions, 2, 241 neutral mentions, and 753 positive mentions. The final sentiment score is 0.247657295850067, which reflects a positive result. This score indicates that when people talked about El Clásico most of them had a neutral to slightly positive view towards the game.

### C. 2. Histogram of El Clásico positive score



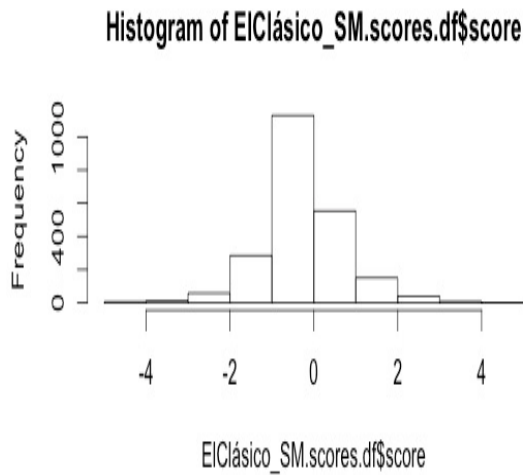
The image shows the highest positive score is five and most tweets have scores between 1 and 2. Most tweets showed positive feelings towards the El Clásico

### C.3. Histogram of El Clásico negative score



The image shows the lowest negative score is -5 and most tweets have scores between -1 and -2. Therefore, most tweets contained a slightly negative view of the game.

#### A. 4. Histogram of El Clásico sentiment score



The image shows the normal distribution of El Clásico's sentiment score, which confirms the accuracy of the results.

#### **D. Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the rivalry will go on and the public has a neutral to positive view of the rivalry. Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona have resonated and empathized with each other because they share many similar characteristics and situations, even though they represent different political ideologies, classes, cultures, cities, and regions.

First, consider the words of José Miguel González Martín del Campo, commonly known as Míchel, who played for Real Madrid C.F. for over a decade: “Both clubs were born in the same place, with the same ideas” (Lowe, 2014). “They are different in terms of the outward symbols but, in their souls, I do not know if they are so different really” He says, “Rivalry is also admiration” (Lowe, 2014).

Although FC Barcelona, the Catalan flagship, has promoted regional culture and pride, it was founded by a group of foreigners including Swiss football pioneer, player, and club president Joan Gamper in 1899. The club also has provided the highest number of players to the Spanish national team in the FIFA World Cup, even though Catalonia has fought for its independence. Real Madrid C.F., the best Spanish ambassador, was founded in March 6 1902 by Juan Padrós Rubió and Carlos Padrós Rubió, who were born in Barcelona. The Padrós brothers served as the two presidents of the club. Therefore, since the beginning, neither hate nor love could capture the dynamic between the two clubs.

Second, both teams have enjoyed great success and dominate La Liga and other international sports competition. Deloitte Consulting LLP, a world-renowned consulting

firm, issued a report in 2014 that showed Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona created more profit than any other clubs on the planet for the sixth consecutive year. According to *Forbes* magazine, Real Madrid C.F. remains the most valuable and richest football club in the world (Lowe, 2014). It is worth \$3.4 billion with an annual revenue of \$675 billion. FC Barcelona is the second most valuable and fourth richest football club. It is worth \$3.2 billion with an annual revenue of \$627 billion (Lowe, 2014).

Real Madrid C.F. has won 32 titles in the Primera División of the Liga Nacional de Fútbol Profesional (First Division of Spanish Professional Football League or LFP or La Liga), 10 titles in Union of European Football Association (UEFA) Champions, and 3 Intercontinental Cup trophies. Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) recognized Real Madrid C.F. as the best club of the 20th century. The International Federation of Football History and Statistics (IFFHS) called the club the “Best European Club of the 20th Century.” Real Madrid C.F. has won more European Cups than any other club. IFFHS ranks FC Barcelona the best of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The club also won 22 La Liga titles and 4 European Cups. These clubs have been two of only three teams to spend their entire history fighting in the Primera División (First Division) of La Liga. Every single winner of the FIFA World Player Award for the past eighteen years, including Alfredo Stéfano Di Stéfano Laulhé (Madrid), László Kubala (Barcelona), Zinedine Yazid Zidane (Madrid), Ronaldo de Assis Moreira (Barcelona), Iker Casillas Fernández (Madrid), Xavier Hernández i Creus (Barcelona), Cristiano Ronaldo dos Santos Aveiro (Madrid), and Lionel Andrés Messi Cuccittini (Barcelona) has played for either club at some stage of his career.



The glorious history and the shining trophies of the two clubs not only have demonstrated their dominant positions in the field and in the media, but also have locked them in permanent confrontation. These trophies also made them the most-loved and most-hated clubs in La Liga. For example, 51% of La Liga fans across Spain despised Real Madrid (FourFourTwo, 2011). Therefore, they have been in the same situation. Only the rival can understand what the club has been going through. For example, these two titans also work as two influential and democratic institutions because they have been owned and operated by their members and fans. The clubs carry enormous social weight due to their impact and media attention. Both teams also compete on and off the pitch. On one hand, Marcos Alonso Peña, a former Barcelona player, argues that Barcelona has more social significance because both players and fans have “a sense of complete identification with the club. It means a massive amount for Catalan society” (Lowe, 2014). On the other hand, Ramón Calderón, a former President of Madrid C.F., claims, “Madrid represented an identification with success” (Lowe, 2014).

This love-hate relationship between Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona not only captures the differences but also emphasizes the dynamics, interactions, and mutual exclusiveness of the two giants. One club defines itself by identifying the characteristics of the opponent and going a different direction. For example, being a Madridista (a fan of Real Madrid C.F.) must mean being an anti-clúes. Historical reasons, political factors, and sports competitions have contributed to the rivalry and kept it perpetual. Both teams do share one thing in common: they hate each other. For example, *As* newspaper carried a poll showing 97% of Madridistas considered FC Barcelona the team they hated the most. Clúes definitely made their hate clear by throwing a pig’s head at Luís Figo when he

crossed the Madrid-Barcelona divide in 2000. Jorge Alberto Francisco Valdano Castellanos, a former player, coach, and general manager of Real Madrid C.F., describes the heated situation between the two clubs as “a dialogue of the deaf” because both teams feel obligated to speak ill about each other (Lowe, 2014). Even off the pitch, the two clubs compete for supremacy and influence in the world. Ban Ki-moon, the eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations, along with the ambassadors of the 32 countries qualified for the World Cup visited Estadio Santiago Bernabéu in November 2014. In April 2013, Ban Ki-moon attended the Real Madrid-Levante match, received his Real Madrid jersey, and took the honorary kick-off at the beginning of the game. FC Barcelona was received by Pope Francis in the Vatican in February 2015. The club gave the Pope his Barcelona jersey and made him a clue. Both teams can attract the best football players on the planet and make headlines on global media. Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona combined earned more than \$151.2 million a year in TV rights for La Liga alone. They also make money from ticket sales, merchandise, and crew appearances at commercial events. Social media have helped the rivalry grow and expanded the audience beyond Spain to the entire world. As long as the rivalry exists, the revenue will keep coming.

For instance, in 2002 El Clásico, after many newspapers published the image of the pig's head in the stadium, FC Barcelona's director Gabriel Masfurrull accused pro-Real Madrid C.F. media of making the whole thing up, arguing that one of the cameramen hid the pig's head in the camera bag and tried to create a sensation and ruin the reputation of FC Barcelona. Presidential advisor Josep Maria Minguella argued, “We do not even eat *cochinillo* (Suckling pig) in Catalonia” (Lowe, 2014). *AS* and *Marca* quickly responded

to the accusation by publishing additional images and stories from behind the cameras. Photographers from both *AS* and *Marca* discussed their feelings. One felt disgusted while the other one felt pretty amused. A week later, the newspapers interviewed the King of the *cochinillo*, a chef from Segovia who described the situation as “an insult to the pig.” He explained, “*Cochinillo* is an exquisite cuisine and a symbol of Segovia. It doesn’t deserve to be treated this way” (Lowe, 2014). Nobody knew what really happened or who brought the pig’s head to the stadium and threw it at Figo. However, people talked about what happened in the game for days. Newspapers sold out their copies, supported their clubs, and created a buzz in society. The media promoted the ongoing tension between the two clubs.

The relationship between Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona is symbiotic. The rivalry has encouraged them to become more successful. The success also reinforces the rivalry. Ignacio Zoco Esparza, a former captain of Real Madrid, argues, “Real Madrid wouldn’t be so great if Barcelona did not exist and vice versa” (Lowe, 2014). When FC Barcelona suffered a bad season in 2002, Raúl González Blanco, a former captain of Real Madrid, said, “The rivalry lost a bit of edge, a touch of magic, with Barcelona struggling so badly” (Lowe, 2014). The self-perpetuating rivalry has maintained the delicate balance of the symbiotic ecosystem. Both clubs need each other to survive because they feed off and overcome each other. “If Barcelona did not exist, we’d have to invent them,” the Whites’ president Florentino Pérez claims. Therefore, history has proved the possibility of co-existence. As long as the four beneficiaries pay close attention to the sentiment of the rivalry while advancing their own interest, the current situation will go on.

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